

722.95-  
775-  
8  
2014  
MAY 27 1930

# DRAMA

A MONTHLY RECORD OF THE THEATRE  
IN TOWN AND COUNTRY  
AT HOME & ABROAD



## CONTENTS

FEBRUARY MCMXXX

RECENT PLAYS: BY E. A.  
BAUGHAN / THE GOOD OF  
TRAINING: BY PROF. GILBERT  
MURRAY / THE TECHNIQUE  
OF THEATRE CONSTRUCTION:  
BY BROR DANIELSSON /  
REVIEWS OF NEW BOOKS  
ILLUSTRATIONS

6d.

*Published by*  
THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE  
8 ADELPHI TERRACE  
LONDON  
W.C.

## THE POLYTECHNIC

REGENT STREET, W.1

### SCHOOL of SPEECH TRAINING and DRAMATIC ART

Head of the School:—Miss MARJORIE GULLAN  
DAY AND EVENING CLASSES

are held in

### DRAMA, MIME and PLAY PRODUCTION

Students are coached for London University  
Diploma in Dramatic Art and for L.R.A.M.  
(Elocution) Examinations, and are enabled to  
qualify for the medals offered by the  
Incorporated London Academy of Music.

Frequent Performances

### VERSE SPEAKING

Promising students from the day and  
evening classes are admitted to the Verse  
Speaking Choirs.

For prospectus apply to The Registrar, School of  
Speech Training, The Polytechnic, Regent Street,  
London, W.1.

## B. A. PITTAR (Producer).

RECENT PRODUCTIONS INCLUDE

"Lilies of the Field" (Berkhamsted, A.D.S.)  
"Secrets" (Egham and Staines, A.D.S.)  
"9.45"  
"Nothing but the Truth" (Canterbury, A.D.S.)  
"The Witch" (Newcastle-on-Tyne  
"The Torchbearers" } Repertory Co.)  
"Aren't we all" (Acerington, A.D.S.)

Individual Coaching Undertaken.

For Particulars Apply:

56 PORTLAND ROAD, HOLLAND PARK, W.11  
Phone: Park 3329.

## THEATRE CRAFT SERVICES

17 EXCEL HOUSE, WHITCOMB STREET, W.C.2

COSTUMES designed and executed for Pro-  
fessional and Amateur Productions.

Original Fancy Dresses

STAGE SETTINGS and LIGHTING designed  
and executed, and entire productions staged and  
rehearsed by Professional Coach

INDIVIDUAL ATTENTION given to each  
order by a Fully Qualified Specialist, on each  
branch of the work, in both Historical Accuracy  
and Modern Interpretation  
MODERATE CHARGES

## MISS WEBBER'S

Typewriting Office

PLAYS, PARTS, AUTHORS' MSS., Etc.  
VISITING SECRETARIES.  
DUPLICATING.

6 Suffolk Street, Pall Mall, London, S.W.1  
(Telephones: Gerrard 4387)

VOICE PRODUCTION. DRAMATIC TECHNIQUE.

## LAURA SMITHSON

L.R.A.M. Elocution Double Diploma, Regd. Teacher  
Of Principal West-end Theatres and "Old Vic."  
Shakespeare Co.

and

## IVY SMITHSON

(Local Representative, The Guildhall School of Music)

Communications to:—

102 Abbey Road Mansions, N.W.8, and  
1 Ropner Terrace, Stockton-on-Tees,  
Co. Durham.

## THE VILLAGE DRAMA SOCIETY

(in association with the British Drama League.)

Good Historical Costumes on hire at very  
low rates to players in Town and Country.

Special terms to members of the British  
Drama League.

Plays for reading. Advice given.  
Playwriting Competitions.

The Hon. Secretary,

## THE VILLAGE DRAMA SOCIETY

15 Peckham Road, S.E. 5.

Tel. No.: Rodney 3366

## Miss BEATRICE LEWISOHN

IS OPEN TO RECEIVE MEMBERS FOR  
HER DRAMATIC SOCIETY.

PUBLIC PERFORMANCES.

MODERATE SUBSCRIPTION.

Next Session commences FEBRUARY 15th.

Apply:—

MISS LEWISOHN, The Studio, "Q" Theatre,  
Kew Bridge.

Please mention "DRAMA" when replying to advertisements

□□□□

1.)  
1.)

1.)

1.)  
1.)

11

□□□□

S

2.2

ro-

ed

nd

ch

ch

cy

QUE.

cher.

,"

usic).

N

tre,

V

F

m  
Ch  
no  
ha  
“

co  
(P  
17  
of  
Sh  
no  
m  
bu  
he  
an  
“

in  
Lo  
wi  
wi  
Th

Th  
ne  
“  
fr  
ha  
It  
an  
dr

th  
an  
be  
a  
wi  
ma

# DRAMA

VOL. 8

FEBRUARY MCMXXX

NUMBER 14

---

THE JOURNAL OF THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE

---

## SOME RECENT PLAYS

By E. A. Baughan

FROM the middle of December to the middle of January has been a "dole" month for the dramatic critic. Except for the Christmas entertainments, of which, I do not propose to write, activity in the drama has been mainly confined to the little theatre. "Madame Plays Nap," a new romantic comedy by Brenda Girvin and Monica Cosens (produced at the New Theatre on December 17th) gave Sybil Thorndike an opportunity of appearing in a Madame Sans-Gene part. She worked very hard indeed, but she is not naturally a comedienne. That does not mean that she has not a sense of humour, but simply that her personality, and especially her voice, does not lend itself to comedy, and certainly not to farce. I imagine that "Madame Plays Nap," may be successful in the country, but it certainly was not for London. It is not surprising to hear that within a week or so from the day when I write this the play will have left the New Theatre.

The revival of "Typhoon" at the Duchess Theatre just before Christmas was made necessary by the failure of Hubert Griffith's "Tunnel Trench," a play which suffered from the fact that more striking war plays have been produced since it was written. It has good moments, but is too diffuse, and the war as a background has very little dramatic significance.

In "Typhoon" Dennis Neilson-Terry took the part created by the late Laurence Irving and he told us in a speech that it had always been his desire to act the part. It was a clever performance, but the play itself, which years ago we thought was a kind of masterpiece, proved to be rather old-fashioned

melodrama. "The Man at Six," revived for the Christmas Session at matinees, has now gone with the evening bill at the Duchess Theatre, and Dennis Neilson-Terry is condemned to be a crook once again.

One of the most interesting performances not only of the month but of the year as a whole was the belated stage production of the Poet Laureate's play "The Humours of the Court" (Arts Theatre Club, January 5th). This was given by past and present members of the O.U.D.S. with the assistance of Edith Evans, Alison Leggatt, and Elsa Palmer in the women's parts. The play was written more than thirty years ago, and yet this was its first performance. It owes much to Calderon and, in a lesser degree, to Lope de Vega, but it is only a superficial likeness, due to the plot and its intrigue. The character of the love-lorn Countess and the discovery she makes in the end as to the nature of a man's real love is original. All of Robert Bridges' verse is not easy to speak, but the play contains many beautiful passages, and more humour than one had expected from the Poet Laureate. Some of the intrigue is rather sketchily handled and the production did not make the most of it. But on the whole "The Humours of the Court" is a comedy of real distinction. The part of the Countess was finely played by Edith Evans, and Alison Leggatt was excellent as the adopted sister of the countess. Of the men, Richard Goolden, as the traditional cunning and humorous servant of seventeenth century comedy, and George Howe as a precious poet in love with the countess were perfect. If we had a National Theatre this is a play



## SOME RECENT PLAYS

which would not have been kept on the shelf for more than thirty years.

We have seen two more of the plays of Jean-Jacques Bernard. In "Martini" (Gate Theatre) his methods of not allowing his characters to express their thoughts has not become an obsession. The drama of a girl's love is beautifully drawn, and the reticence with which it is expressed makes it all the more beautiful. In "Illusion" (a poor translation of "L'Invitation au Voyage") the author's technique mars the drama. At the Everymans Theatre (January 8th) the part of the young wife who discovers after two years that her love for a young man we do not see was an illusion, was played by Josephine Wilson, who has not sufficient variety to give substance to a

monotonous character. There is not enough dramatic interest in a grown woman's love illusion to hold one's interest. Perhaps if we had seen how and why she thought her husband's friend was in love with her the play would have been stronger. But the author has purposely concentrated on the woman's mind and apparently she has no mind at all. I was disappointed in this play, for "L'Âme en Peine," "Martini," and "The Years Between" have made one expect much from the author.

A successful revival of "French Leave" (Vaudeville, January 7th) was a triumph for Charles Laughton, and a fine revival of "A Midsummer Night's Dream" at the Old Vic. complete the list of the month's plays.

## THE GOOD OF TRAINING\*

By Professor Gilbert Murray

IT is perhaps strange that I still preserve a belief in education, after a whole lifetime spent in it. I have been—it is a serious thought—a Professor of Greek since the age of 23, with one holiday in the middle. But I began as a teacher much earlier. At the age of eight I was put to teach English History in a Sunday School. I taught with little blocks of wood, each block having a coloured picture of a King of England, with the chief events of his reign on one side and his character on the other. The character was summed up in one word, such as Henry VIII, Arbitrary; John, Wicked; Victoria, Virtuous.

There are two widely accepted theories about Education, which sound contradictory but are really not. The first is that no education is any good unless the pupil likes his work and enjoys it. The second, that no education is any good unless it teaches a pupil to master difficulties and face tasks that are hard and distasteful. The advocates of the first say, very truly, that the pupils do not remember things unless they are interested in them. The others point out that, unless a pupil has learnt to make efforts and face and master obstacles, he will never

achieve anything either in art or in life. Both theories are true; and both can be put more strongly. Education does not amount to much unless the pupil really loves his work; and unless, through his love for it, he can face effort and tedium and achieve that "infinite power of taking pains," which Carlyle identified with genius. Every artist understands this. The true artist goes on and on taking pains where the average man would be utterly bored or tired out. I remember when Granville-Barker first studied with me the Messenger's speech in Hippolytus we began by doing it thirteen times on end without stopping, and that was only the beginning.

Now acting has one peculiar difficulty as compared with other arts; in writing, painting, sculpture you can stop and think and take your time; and if you are not feeling your best can wait till to-morrow. In acting you must not only do the thing right, but do it without hesitation on the moment. That is one reason why the training is so laborious and the discipline of the stage—for all but exceptional people—so severe. And that is why professional actors and actresses are mostly such excellent

\*A lecture first delivered before the students of the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, and repeated at the Annual Conference of the British Drama League at Northampton, October, 1929.

## THE GOOD OF TRAINING

people. Prima donnas and actor managers are different.

They can afford to have nerves and disobey orders and express their personalities and misbehave generally, but the ordinary actor or actress has to be punctual, hardworking, well-disciplined, with an iron curb upon his vanity and his temper. That is why when I go to heaven I expect to meet quite a lot of professional actors and actresses there; the wailing and gnashing of teeth outside will have to be done almost entirely by amateurs, stiffened by a few prima donnas and actor managers.

Thus, this training satisfies the two requirements of method: pupils learn what they learn because they love it; and in order to learn it, they are compelled to do hard things and conquer obstacles. But what is it that the pupils learn?

I can only speak in general terms, because I know too little. One can but take certain points which are essential in dramatic training. First they learn how to use limbs and body. To get a live body instead of a dead. It is extraordinary, in our sedentary civilization, how few people, men or women have live bodies. Those who have trained, or seen the training of amateur choruses in Greek Plays, realise it. I remember, many years ago, when helping in the rehearsal of a Greek play, discussing with the other producer what was wrong with the movements of a certain chorus. "All wearing tight stays." Representations conveyed to the proper quarter; no good, muscles somehow stiff or atrophied. Almost inevitable when you think how we mostly live. You sit at breakfast; walk to the train or omnibus; sit there till you get to the office; mostly sit—or sometimes monotonously stand—in the office; sit in the omnibus, sit at dinner, go and sit in a theatre or concert, and the day is over. Outsiders may think that learning to dance, to walk, to fence and the like is a thing of small consequence; but it makes just the difference between having a live and sensitive body and a body that does not vibrate and does not feel. That difference is very considerable for the general value of life. The philosopher Bergson has pointed out how for the greater part of our lives we act like machines, following the ruts of habit, suggestion, social pressure and the like; only at moments do we come alive, exercise will-power and really determine

our actions. You can increase this living and non-mechanical part of life almost indefinitely. And I believe that one of the ways to acquire a live life instead of a dead life is to have a live body instead of a dead body. That is one thing towards which you are helped by Dramatic Training.

So much for the purely physical side. I would take next a point that is partly physical and partly intellectual, I mean the *speaking* of dramatic language, whether verse or prose. There has been an enormous improvement in the speaking of verse within my memory, both on the stage and off. I belong to a generation which was in general afraid to read poetry aloud or speak it or hear it recited. At most a man of my generation could sometimes be heard shouting it in his morning bath—when the touch of cold water gave him spirit and the illusion of solitude did away with his fears. Or he would mutter it to himself in the train when the words were sure to be drowned in the general clatter. I think that one reason for this deplorable shyness was a general hatred of the kind of elocution that was current at the time, a style full of arbitrary rules and mechanical gestures, which committed the fundamental error of treating the poetry as material for showing off the elocution, instead of making the elocution merely an instrument for expressing the poetry.

There have been many changes of taste in this matter. In the 18th century they paid very great attention to the speaking or reading of verse. The 18th century poet, like Pope, expected to be well read, not emotionally, but with point and with changes of expression. If Pope seems colourless and rather flat to us, as compared with Keats or Wordsworth or Shelley, I suspect that the reason is partly that we think of them all as books to be read, whereas Pope definitely intended his verse to be recited or read aloud.

Then there must have been a fine roaring style of stage elocution fashionable about the beginning of the 19th century. Bernard Shaw tells a story of how, when he was a little boy, his father went to see Barry Sullivan play *Othello*. "How did he act?" someone asked him. "Like a mad bull," was the answer—showing incidentally, as Mr. Shaw says, that a gift for pungent

## THE GOOD OF TRAINING

dramatic criticism is hereditary in the Shaw family. In the "mad bull" period however, the actor did declaim his verse as verse. Then came a style for which Henry Irving must bear some responsibility, a style in which, in order to escape from the smooth monotony of verse rhythm, the actor deliberately mutilated and wrecked the rhythm and tried to turn the verse into prose. Considering that Shakespeare must have taken a good deal of trouble to write the verses I do not think he would have been pleased to hear them treated in this way. I think at the present day we have got back to a far more beautiful and reasonable way of speaking Shakespeare, a change always associated in my mind with the style of Forbes-Robertson.

But of course off the stage elocution was much worse. There is a fierce light that beats upon the stage, which in course of time shows up any style that is really pretentious and false. It was in private entertainment and on school speech days that the teachers of elocution worked their wicked will. You can see parodies of the over-emotional styles in old Punches; I will not discuss them.

Those of you who have had the pleasure, the extreme pleasure, of hearing the verse speaking that is now done by one or two of the special schools in London, and also in Scotland, or who have listened to the verse-speaking competitions organized by Mr. Masefield in Oxford, will realize the wonderful improvement that is taking place in the art of speaking verse. I confess that I have come away from those competitions, where I have sometimes acted as a judge, in a state of something like delighted happiness, feeling that at last English poetry could be spoken and heard as the poet in his own mind conceived it.

In a School of Dramatic Art the speaking of prose must take fully as large a place as the speaking of poetry, and probably larger. It has its own difficulties, and of course prose drama is ever so much commoner and stronger and more important at the present day than poetic drama can hope to be. But I have spoken specially about the speaking of verse because good verse-speaking is a rarer accomplishment than good speaking of prose; because poetry is more utterly destroyed by bad speaking

than prose is; and because the realistic style that now flourishes in most forms of literature leads naturally towards prose and away from verse. Of course the public will always come in greater numbers to hear realistic prose plays about contemporary life than to any work of art that demands a higher imaginative effort. The public is to almost all artists the inevitable partner, the paymaster, the tyrant, the friend, and the enemy.

But of that later. I have spoken of the importance of the art of movement, and the art of speaking, things which most people imagine they can do quite well without training. Some of them no doubt can, but certainly a great many deceive themselves. Now I would deal with an art which from the educational point of view is more important still; the art of *understanding*. I mean the art of understanding what is said to you, or what you read, in your own language. Most people imagine that when they read a book—I do not mean a book on philosophy or mathematics, but a fairly good play or novel or work of criticism—they understand what it says. But that is a gigantic mistake. I feel sure that the ordinary reader does not understand a tenth part of what he reads or hears, he misses most of it altogether and what he does get he mostly gets wrong. This is a fact, of which I am informing you, but of course it is a secret; an awful secret, only known fully to those who have given courses of lectures and then examined the class afterwards. And you must remember that such a class is a very favourable specimen indeed of the average power of understanding. It consists of selected persons; they know they are going to be examined and therefore pay special attention; they are probably accustomed to listening to lectures and writing examination papers. But the result of his first examination of his pupils is always, always a shock to the young lecturer. I once knew a man, an intelligent man, who attended a course of French History about the Return of the Bourbons after the defeat of Napoleon; he somehow misheard the word "Bourbons," and thought it was "Poor-Laws"—and wrote elaborate notes about the Return of the Poor-Laws to power, and the odd way in which the Poor-Laws behaved when on the throne. And you





CHORUS OF SPIRITS OF THE SNOW IN  
 "ARDVORLICH'S WIFE," BY GORDON  
 BOTTOMLEY. AS PERFORMED AT MR.  
 JOHN MASEFIELD'S VERSE-SPEAKING  
 FESTIVAL IN HIS THEATRE AT BOARS  
 HILL, OXFORD, JULY AND OCTOBER,  
 1929.



A SCENE FROM "TEN NIGHTS IN A BAR ROOM,"<sup>22</sup> MR. PETER GODFREY'S PRODUCTION AT THE GATE THEATRE, LONDON.

## THE GOOD OF TRAINING

will remember the story told against himself by Bishop Wilberforce. He determined to preach a course of sermons in very simple language making intelligible to his village audience the main doctrines of Christianity. He began with the Trinity and tried to make the doctrine of the Church absolutely clear. Then he asked an intelligent farmer to tell him candidly what he thought of the sermon. The farmer was polite and hedged. Wilberforce begged for absolute candour. At last the farmer spoke up: "Well, you may say what you like, Mr. Wilberforce, but I believe there is a God above us yet."

Now what is the best way to make sure that people do understand, not scientific but imaginative literature, especially plays or poetry? Much the best way is to make them rehearse it: to read the words again and again, to say them with the right emphasis, to study the exact meaning and feeling again in order to get the right emphasis. I should like any of His Majesty's Inspectors to consider this test. Take a sixth form in a good school, consisting of the cleverest boys, and make them get up Hamlet for examination, reading commentaries and making notes, but not reading the play aloud, much less acting it; and take on the other hand a class in a dramatic school or elsewhere which has rehearsed the play, day by day, carefully under a good teacher. The two classes will know different things, and I dare say the first will score in marks in an examination, but the second will, I am convinced, really understand Hamlet better, and I think the Inspector will agree with me. I have been glad to see in both secondary and elementary schools a great increase in the practice of teaching literature by making the pupils read poetry and plays aloud. But of course reading aloud once or even twice is not much good. It is the intensive study that produces intimate understanding, and patient practice in learning how to understand and to speak that really reveals the beauty of drama or poetry.

Thus Dramatic Training, with its rehearsals, its intensive study and its speaking of drama does its best to ensure understanding. Understanding is the first condition of *Interpretation*. And Interpretation is the actor's ultimate business. By his power as an interpreter he stands or falls.

I said earlier that to almost all artists the public is the inevitable partner, the paymaster, the tyrant, the friend, and the enemy. And it depends on the artist's power of interpretation which of those he is most, and to what degree. I remember once, after long rehearsals of a difficult play which had interested the actors and the producer a great deal, on the first night before the curtain rose, as we were waiting behind the scenes, someone suddenly asked the question: "Is anybody coming?" And one of us, a man now famous, went round in front to see. In a few minutes he returned. "Yes, they're coming," he said: "crowds of them. All with foreheads like chimpanzees."

They had not really foreheads like chimpanzees, at least not noticeably so; not more than the rest of us. But there was a deep unspoken source of strife between us and them, between the artists and the audience. To the artist his art was his main and most serious interest; he was taking immense trouble; he was using to the full his imagination, his emotion and very likely his intellect. To him the production of his work of art was a critical moment in the most serious part of life. To the public—speaking broadly and allowing for exceptions—it did not belong to the serious part of life at all. The average member of the public did not come to the theatre to make a great imaginative or emotional effort; he had made his efforts during the day, and was rather tired, and wanted to be amused or thrilled or interested with as little hard work on his part as possible. He wanted an easy pleasant time, and we were expecting him to use his imagination to the full. Hence the clash.

Is there any solution of that clash, or must we rest content with the apparent fact that good art will bore the public and only cheap and easy art will pay? Shall we rest content with the conception that we and our whole art only exist for the purpose of entertainment? Well, I have never yet known an artist—whether actor, writer, musician or painter—who really in his heart accepted that view. I have never met a single one who, whether he was paid six pounds a week, or sixty, or six hundred, did not feel that the real value of his art was something quite different from its money value. Of course every artist has to get

## THE GOOD OF TRAINING

his money; of course he likes to get his money, and the more he gets the better pleased he will naturally be; but all the time the thing that he is really proud of, the thing that gives him self-respect and makes him feel that on the whole he would not like to be anybody else, is the quality of his art itself.

For my own part, speaking from a certain amount of experience, I think the solution of the problem is to be found by remembering that an artist has always two different tasks to carry on at the same time. He has first to express the thing he wants to express; and secondly, he has to make it carry. If I may take my own very imperfect work as an instance, I start by loving Greek tragedy and feeling that no modern audience or public wants to hear or read a Greek tragedy. They don't like tragedy, they don't like Greek. And they feel fairly sure that they won't like the mixture. Also, a Greek tragedy in the original, as it is handed down to us, is for obvious reasons very hard to understand. Consequently I have two tasks before me. First, to understand as well as possible the Greek Play; when I succeed approximately, though of course not perfectly, in doing that, I have a real live play in my head. I then start on a quite different undertaking, that of trying to convey that play to other people.

That is not unlike the ordinary work that an actor has to perform in interpreting a play to an audience, in making it carry. And if he does his job really well, it is surprising what difficult things he can induce the chimpanzees to do, what imaginative efforts he can induce them to make. I fear that not everyone will believe me, but there was once an actor in America who used to play Hamlet, Macbeth and Othello behind a wire netting, because he played in such a way that the audience could not refrain from throwings things at him. It is a pathetic story. He simply loved playing Shakespearian tragedy. He could not tear himself away from it. Yet whenever he played the audience was moved to pelt him with eggs, apples, potatoes and other suitable objects. Evidently he did not succeed in interpreting to them his own æsthetic enjoyment and emotion. As I say, it is a pathetic story, but fortunately it has a happy ending. The entertainment

of pelting a tragic actor through a wire grating proved popular. Crowds went to see that Hamlet or Othello who had never gone to any other Hamlet or Othello; and the misunderstood artist lived in considerable prosperity. He had discovered a special technique for amusing the chimpanzees, but one that most of us could not imitate.

I have no special message to convey on the general subject of interesting an audience without playing down to it, except this. An ordinary assemblage of people is extraordinarily suggestible. There are a thousand ways of interesting them. Some are easy, no doubt, and some difficult. But I believe that in this, as in most other walks of life, courage is what pays. An audience will rise to tragedy, or to classical music, or to an elevated style of poetry, or various other performances that demand close attention and imaginative effort—the audience will rise to them on certain conditions: that you yourself enjoy the performance and believe in it, that you are not afraid of it and tempted to play for laughs or for irrelevant distractions which spoil the main effect, and lastly that you understand it well enough to be a good interpreter. Make them see what you see and feel what you feel, and the chimpanzees will be with you every time.

*Movement, speaking, understanding, interpreting:* there is one last point on which I will end these remarks. You often hear a criticism, perhaps a rather philistine criticism, of the whole idea of dramatic training. "The best way to learn acting," say these critics, "is to get on to the stage young. The surest way to success is to get personally known to managers and proprietors. No amount of training in a dramatic school will rival those two methods or be a substitute for them." Of course there is an element of truth in such criticisms. I dare say that a really clever and industrious child of fifteen, who should get on to the stage and study at close quarters the methods of some first-rate actors, would get an exceptionally good training. Also such a child would quickly acquire a sense of the sort of thing that the public likes. But, in the first place, we are taking a very exceptional case: not one in a hundred aspirants to the stage is likely to have such luck as the child we are imagining. And,

## THE GOOD OF TRAINING

in the second place, is there not really something better to aim at than the power of getting familiar with the boards and knowing what will please the public?

It seems to me to involve all the difference between apprenticeship and education. The apprentice is taught to do some particular thing that is wanted at the moment. He reads the instructions on the box and acts accordingly. He is told to pull such and such handles when the machine is to start, and such and such others when it is to stop. But he does not understand, and is not expected to understand, what the instructions really mean or why the handles act as they do. He is not taught to understand the machine. That would be education, and that is what he has not got.

Do you want really to understand Hamlet and Macbeth, or Euripides, or Racine and Molière? Do you want to be able to enjoy them yourself? To feel the beauty of verse and to understand the ideas of poets, even if they do not belong to the common-places of life or of the stage? Do you want, in interpreting a play to the public, to interpret out of the fulness of a mind well-stored and keenly attuned, or will you be content to live, as it were, intellectually from hand to mouth, making shot after shot at amusing the chimpanzees, sometimes failing and sometimes succeeding? Well, some people will prefer one method and some the other. There are lots of actors and actresses—as there are lots of people in most other professions—who seem to have succeeded brilliantly with no brains at all.

But there is one thing to be obtained at a good Dramatic School which I should certainly count among the real permanent blessings of life. At such a school you have the chance to get a great amount of poetry deep into your bones, you understand it, you know it by heart, you know each little vibration of its meaning or its music, and throughout life it will never leave you. That is a priceless possession. It provides you with a sort of peaceful and happy refuge to which you can escape when life grows too disagreeable, or when your courage flags. The people of my generation, as I said before, generally sang in their morning bath—sang or repeated poetry. The shock of the cold water set us off. I remember a college friend of mine who used to

recite Shelley, after his bath, when he was shaving, mixed with an occasional oath or exclamation when he happened to cut himself. That was long, long ago. He went to India, governed provinces, became a very distinguished and trusted public servant, with the most varied experience. Last year after his return from India I happened to be in the same house with him, and I heard him repeating poetry to himself as he washed his face, with sudden interruptions when the face went under water. I could not quite catch the words, but they brought back memories of the old Shelley that used to mix with his shaving:

The one remains, the many change and pass,  
(Damn)  
Heaven's light for ever shines, earth's shadows  
fly.

Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,  
Stains the white radiance of eternity,  
Until Death tramples it to fragments.

(Where's that cotton wool?)

Poetry had stayed with him, unchanged, through a lifetime of strenuous and varied exertions, a white radiance not really stained, though often changing colour, amid all the vicissitudes of a grinding world.

I would say to you: If you love the art that you practise here, if you love the movement, the speaking, the understanding, and the interpretation to others; if you build for yourselves an imaginative world out of the minds of the great poets and dramatists among whom you work, you are making for yourselves not only a refuge in trouble, not only a source of strength in the struggles of life, but also a "White radiance" which will go far to save you, amid the daily details and inevitable disappointments of an artist's life, from ever finding the whole world gross or dead or dull.

---

### ARE DRAMATIC SCHOOLS WASTE OF TIME?

This question will be debated by Miss Muriel Pratt and Mr. Kenneth Barnes (Principal of the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art) at a meeting of the Drama League Club Room at 8 Adelphi Terrace, on Friday, February 7th, at 8.30 p.m. Those wishing to be present should apply to the Club Secretary, at the above address, who will forward full particulars.



## “EXITS AND ENTRANCES”

MR. Galsworthy's latest play, *The Roof*, provides some good examples of the way in which a skilled dramatist utilises the entrances and exits of his characters, so that they not only seem natural in themselves, but also serve further purpose in the play. In the first six scenes, which take place in various rooms in an hotel, the action is supposed to be simultaneous; we watch the exit of a character from a room in one scene, and see him enter another in the next.

The scene in the Beetons' bedroom, for instance, which is pure comedy, bordering on farce, up to this point, is interrupted by the entrance of the nurse who is attending Lennox, another guest at the hotel. Her patient is suffering from an acute heart attack, and she is trying to borrow a hypodermic syringe, having broken her own. This episode at first seems intended merely to shed an amusing light on the character of the Beetons, by illustrating their attitude to illness; but it also serves to arouse our interest in Lennox, whom we have hitherto not met, and gives an added poignancy to the scene in the Lennox's room later, when we realise the desperate nature of the emergency which compelled the nurse to intrude on the Beetons at dead of night.

Earlier in this scene, Mrs. Lennox goes out for a few minutes to see if her children are safely in bed—a very natural precaution, as the audience realises, having seen the children in their bedroom earlier in the play; and this gives Lennox an opportunity of confiding to the nurse—what he has been carefully concealing from his wife—his own apprehension of death.

This economy of means, whereby an entrance or exit which is needed for purely practical reasons is also made to serve various other purposes, might be illustrated over and over again from the works of Shakespeare, Ibsen, and other masters of the craft. Yet we still often see plays in which the characters drift on and off the stage for no apparent reason, or for reasons which are so flagrantly improbable as to be worse than none at all.

A particularly fatuous example of this is to be found in *Maria Marten*, in the scene in which Corde, the villain, attempts to decoy Maria to the Red Barn. During their conversation he becomes suddenly thirsty, and sends Maria out to fetch him a drink, for no other reason than that he may, in a soliloquy

inform the audience of his evil designs. This incident is not to be found in the published version of the play, but it certainly occurred on the stage when the play was performed not long ago.

As a contrast to this we may take a scene from Ibsen's *The Wild Duck*. Gregers Werle, having quarrelled with his father, takes up his abode with his friends the Ekdals, renting a room which they have vacant in their house. With an amiable desire to save them trouble, he decides to “do for” himself and dispense with any domestic attendance. On the following day his father comes round to see him, and finds him in the Ekdals' living-room.

Obviously, the interview between father and son is an important incident in the play, and must take place on the stage; it is equally obvious that it is of a private nature, and cannot take place in the presence of the Ekdals. The problem for the dramatist to find a plausible reason for turning the Ekdals out of their room, when Gregers has a room of his own just across the landing to which he and his father might retire.

The way in which Ibsen manages this is a supreme example of his technical skill. Earlier in the scene we have learnt that Gregers, trying his unskilled hand at lighting the stove, has succeeded in smothering the room with soot and deluging it with water, with the result that he has to use the Ekdals' room until his own can be cleaned. Incidentally this illustrates the unpractical character of Gregers, the easy hospitality of Hjalmar Ekdal, and the practical nature of his wife.

Later, when the elder Werle comes to look for his son, and suggests that he wishes to speak to him in his own room, Mrs. Ekdal immediately protests that this is impossible; the suggestion that they should retire to the passage outside outrages the hospitable instinct of the Ekdals, who very naturally solve the difficulty by finding an excuse for retiring to another room themselves.

It seems clear that the episode of the stove was introduced primarily for this purpose; but Ibsen has used it, not merely to develop his characters, but almost to symbolise the whole part taken in the play by Gregers Werle, the unpractical idealist whose altruistic desire to help others only results in bringing more trouble upon all concerned.

C. M. BOWEN.

## BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE NOTES



THE JOURNAL OF

### THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE.

*President :*

LORD HOWARD DE WALDEN.

*Chairman of the Council :*

H. GRANVILLE-BARKER.

*Secretary :* GEOFFREY WHITWORTH.

*Hon Treasurer :* ALEC REA.

*MSS. for publication in DRAMA will be considered if accompanied by stamps for return if unsuitable. All Enquiries should be addressed to the Hon. Secretary, at the Offices of the League, 8 Adelphi, Terrace London, W.C.2.*

Telephone: TEMPLE BAR 8507-8.

*Neither the Editor nor the Drama League as a whole accepts any responsibility for the opinions expressed in signed articles printed in this Journal.*

MEMBERS of the League will shortly receive from the B.B.C. a pamphlet giving among other information, particulars of a course of Lectures which should be of special interest to all students of the Drama. At 7.25 p.m. on six consecutive Fridays, beginning March 7th, Mr. Desmond MacCarthy is to broadcast six Talks on "Some Modern Dramas and How to Appreciate Them." Those who heard Mr. MacCarthy's Lecture on Ibsen, one of the Course organized by the League to celebrate the Ibsen Centenary two years ago, at once recognized in Mr. MacCarthy one of our most inspiring critics of the Theatre. The present series of Talks should therefore have wide appeal. It is suggested that some of our own affiliated societies might like to discuss the Talks at a weekly meeting, or individual members might do worse than consider the formation of private Study Circles to meet together for the purpose of listening to the Talks and discussing them afterwards.

The syllabus of the Fourth Easter School of Community Drama, to be held in London at The Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, can now be obtained. Special features are the Evening Rehearsals, which start on April 7th, and the Easter Week-end Course. Two Summer Schools are also in prospect. From July 24th to August 2nd we shall have the use of the Maddermarket Theatre, Norwich, famous as the only Modern English Playhouse with an Elizabethan Stage. Mr. Tyrone Guthrie will conduct the morning rehearsal-work and in the evenings Mr. Nugent Monk will give a series of Lectures on the production of various types of play, from Mediæval through Elizabethian, Georgian, and Nineteenth Century to Expressionist. With the help of the Norwich Players he will illustrate what he has to say with demonstrations of dialogue, movement, gesture, and the proper manner of wearing the costumes of each period, which he will supply from his theatre's wardrobe. In Scotland, the Scottish Community Drama Association will share our responsibility from August 18th to 28th for a second St. Andrew's School. This will again be residential and will, we trust, again prove very attractive to Northerners. At all three Schools advanced work will be supplemented by special courses for novices, and the interests of village and other societies of small means will receive careful attention. At Norwich there will be a Children's Day.

It may be of interest to organisers of courses in dramatic work to know that the Library now has a Book-box available for hire, containing books on costume, scenery, production, and lighting, together with books on the history of dramatic art, and a certain number of representative modern plays. Further particulars may be obtained on application to the Librarian.

The Library we would remind members, is open daily (except Saturdays and Sundays) from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. On Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. For the benefit of readers or borrowers who find it inconvenient to come to the Library during the day, there is a special evening extension till 9 p.m. on Wednesdays and Thursdays. The Club Room is open daily (except Sundays) from 10.30 till 7.

# RECENT BOOKS

Reviewed by Norman Marshall

"Myself and the Theatre." By Theodore Komisarjevsky. Heinemann. 12s. 6d.  
 "The Theatre." By Sheldon Cheney. Longmans. 42s.  
 "English Costume of the Nineteenth Century." Drawn by Iris Brook. Described by James Laver. Black. 6s.  
 "Shakespeare." By John Bailey. Longmans. 3s. 6d.  
 "The Plays of John Galsworthy." Duckworth. 8s. 6d.  
 "The Romance of Heraldry." By C. Wilfrid Scott-Giles. Dent. 10s. 6d.

IT is some weeks now since Mr. Komisarjevsky's book first appeared, but I have read only a very small number of reviews which treated it with anything like the seriousness which it deserves. Perhaps the publishers are partly to blame for sending it out under a title, suggestive of nothing more important than another collection of theatrical tittle-tattle and labelling it with a puff on the cover which refers to the book as a "story of drama and adventure in Russia under the revolution." It is a depressing sign of the times that a book on production and acting by one of the leading producers of the day cannot be relied upon to appeal to the public without a sugaring of personal gossip and "drama and adventure." For those who want it, the book does contain a certain amount of the conventional sort of theatrical chit-chat and some stories of the Russian revolution; but Mr. Komisarjevsky is not a particularly good journalist, and these chapters are tepid fare compared with the rest of the book in which he discusses his theories on acting and production, and rather bitterly attacks methods of theatrical management in this country. There is so much of absorbing interest in the book and so many controversial points over which I am tempted to argue that I dare not allow myself any attempt to review it on this page where room must also be found this month for several other books of more than usual interest. It is emphatically a book which everybody intelligently interested in the theatre on either side of the curtain ought to read and keep. The illustrations are plentiful and un-hackneyed, but might have been more successfully reproduced.

Mr. Sheldon Cheney's "The Theatre" has as its sub-title "Three Thousand Years of Drama, Acting and Stagecraft." Recently we have had several dramatic surveys of these three thousand years, but while some of them have been about the drama and others about stage-craft, none of them has taken the theatre as its subject—the theatre in the sense of the combination of the arts of play-writing, acting, production and designing. I do not want in any way to underrate the importance and practical usefulness of these other histories of the drama, but the fact remains that they are the work of writers whose interest in the theatre is scholarly and literary rather than theatrical. I can only think of one forerunner to Mr. Sheldon Cheney's book, and that is Mr. Ashley Dukes' book in the Home University series. Mr. Cheney's book is a thoroughly satisfying combination of scholarship and complete understanding of the theatre—which is something much more than just "drama." In spite of its bulkiness it makes easy reading on account of the rapidity and

incisiveness of the style, and it is superbly illustrated.

Owing to the fact that serious books on the theatre appeal to a comparatively limited public, it is not often that the publishers are able to offer any very sensational bargains in this line, but it is a long time since I have seen a book which was quite as good a bargain as "English Costume of the Nineteenth Century." The plan of the book is extremely simple. There are some fifty pages of illustrations, and opposite each of these pages is a brief note on the essentials of the costumes depicted. Both text and illustrations are remarkable for the way every unnecessary detail is eliminated without the smallest suggestion of scrapiness. One of the many virtues of the notes is the attention given to the materials used and the methods of trimming, padding and lining. But it would be entirely wrong to give the impression that this is only a book for the theatrical designer. It will delight anybody with a sense of period who cares for a book with a thorough individual flavour, charmingly produced and published at a ridiculously low price.

Mr. John Bailey's book is typical of the new commonsense method of Shakespearean criticism which never loses sight of the fact that Shakespeare wrote for the theatre and that the answer to most of the problems which have worried Shakespeare commentators in the past is to be found in the plot or the stalls. For instance, Mr. Bailey dismisses the old problem of the exact duration of the action in "Othello" by pointing out that in the theatre no one asks these questions. "No spectator knows or cares whether Shakespeare meant the action to last two days or two months, and he did not know or care himself." Again, dealing with "Hamlet" he points out that most of its numerous "problems" exist mainly in the study; "and here as always we have to remember that Shakespeare wrote for the stage, where people have neither time nor inclination to puzzle themselves over obscurities or inconsistencies." He goes on to urge that many questions which reading cannot answer become clear enough in the theatre through the tone and manner of the actor. But I do not think that even Mr. Bailey puts sufficient trust in the actor as an interpreter of Shakespeare. When he says that "the actor of to-day has not got Shakespeare to direct him but only Shakespeare's text to interpret as best he can," I feel that he underrates that curious instinctive understanding of a part which is one of the gifts of a good actor and enables him to give a rich and subtle interpretation of a character about which his conscious mind often understands nothing at all.

I suppose that by now everybody who is sufficiently interested in the theatre to buy plays already possesses the collected edition of Mr. Galsworthy's works for the theatre. Just in case any reader of this paper has not yet bought the book it is perhaps worth while pointing out that it is easily the most dignified and readable of all the many omnibus editions which have so far appeared, and probably the best value for the money, especially as it contains the author's most recent play, "The Roof." Another book I would like to recommend is "The Romance of Heraldry." It is excellently illustrated and is full of inspiration for the theatrical designer.

# THE TECHNIQUE OF THEATRE CONSTRUCTION

By Bror Danielsson

THE first part of this book,\* one that is intended to cover the whole of modern stage-technique, has now been published. It gives us all those facts that we have been hitherto obliged to pick up from all sorts of papers and reviews. It is a pity that its writer, Mr. Kranich, who is himself a Stage manager in Hanover and Bayreuth, has not only described the most recent stage constructions but has also tried to criticise some which have not yet come into actual existence. A storm of indignation has arisen from the inventors attacked, who are replying to Mr. Kranich in various German papers.

His main platform, as set out at the beginning of the book, harmonises with the present German view on the subject: "The building prepares the abode for the play. The scenery serves as a frame for the art of the theatre. The stage-technique gives the play its basis and its vitality. The coming stage type is to be created in the following way. The science of the theatre prepares the basis, the professional expert gives the suggestion, and the studios carry it out and thereby again create a basis for new experiments."

I must object to his terming the scenery a frame. Mr. Kranich is still too much influenced by the old Wagnerian decorative style. The scenery is an integral part of a play (and a play only exists on the stage). One must always remember that the Producer is (or ought to be) the real and only artist in the theatre. The stage painters (as well as the author and the actors) are only craftsmen directed by the brains of the Producer. Many facts in this book are accepted by practical stage people. They are facts, however, that must be hammered into the heads of young stage technicians, just beyond "puppyhood" and thinking themselves experts in all that concerns the stage. To them the book may be heartily recommended. His account of the expensive rebuilding of the "Staatliches Opernhaus unter den Linden,

Berlin 1926-28," and how the ground plan of the technical director was reduced by these "experts," and the grotesque resolution moved by them, is well worth reading (page 69) as an example how such things can be driven *ad absurdum* through the incompetence of such people.

The author gives first an account of earlier stage-technicians, from Furtenbacher, who introduced the Ltelari-stage, to Lautenskläger who constructed the first revolving stage. And his care to be just to each of them, is admirable. Then there is a chapter on the technical staff. There he is an idealist, and well is he so. Throughout the European theatres of to-day technicians with a very extensive theoretical training are required. I remember well, for example, Mr. Kranich sending the present Lighting manager in Bayreuth to college for four years to be trained in electrical engineering. But Mr. Kranich has gone too far in his demands for a technical staff and does not always see the economic difficulties. For all that, there are some very good suggestions for any stage manager; and a general manager, too, may find herein hints on the duties of his technical staff. And what he says pages 38-41, I must recommend to all artistic producers.

He then gives an account of the Union of German Stage technicians (verband deutscher Bühnentechniker) and of the official regulations for the carrying out of examinations of stage managers. I cannot approve Mr. Kranich's idea that studios should not exist in the theatre. In order not to waste any time and to get efficient work out of the staff, you *must* have a studio in close connection with the theatre. For modernly constructed theatres it is very easy to make such "shops" fireproof. And in Figure 7 Kranich has pointed out very justly that the deficiency of stores close to the stage has prevented the economical working of many stages of to-day. He gives Durden as an example where the stage, built in 1912, is

\*BÜHNENTECHNIK DER GEGENWART Vol. I. By Friedrich Kranich. Illustrated. R. Oldenbourg, Munich, 1929.

## THE TECHNIQUE OF THEATRE CONSTRUCTION

said to be one of the most modern in Germany, but where the store-rooms were deficient, and where, therefore, the side-stages are now used as store-rooms. That nearly all stages of to-day are uneconomical to work is an undoubted fact. The work in a theatre is to a large extent like that in a factory, physical conditions are all important, e.g., the technical work in a theatre which is still built in the old manner and requires "striking" the scenery for each scene is extraordinarily wasteful. From the accounts of most of the bigger stages, it appears that the distribution of work is the best under the circumstances, and that the root of the evil lies in the technical defects of the theatre. Interesting therefore, is the paragraph dealing with the Piscator-stage of 1927-28 in Berlin, where gigantic losses are shown to be due to lack of space for the changing of scenery. Kranich brings up again a proposal of Julius Richter, which is soon to be adopted in Berlin, for the establishment of a central technical studio in the most important towns of Europe and America. Such studios would be open to receive orders for scenery, and would construct every setting and do all technical work, after the plan of the manager, or independently. (See pages 103-105.)

It is a well-known fact that the transport of the stage requisites to and from the theatre is generally carried out in the most uneconomical manner. Kranich's ideas about this point are very sound, but not final.

In the fourth chapter Kranich supports the attack of Mr. Brandt upon the inclined stage plane which is quite antiquated and can no longer be defended (pages 117-124). The inclined stage-plane was invented for the perspective stage—painting of the baroque, and has nothing to do with the modern theatre.

I must object to the author's suggestion for the abolition of traps. Of course, the solid trap construction is out of date. (The old "vampire" trap for the disappearance of an actor is in Germany needed only for about four per cent of the modern plays and operas). But with traps you can get cheaply and rapidly stage effects that otherwise require expensive structures. And a modern stage, driven by hydraulic power, is really a compound of traps, and can slide and sink in sections. The most ideal solution of the stage floor is probably that known as

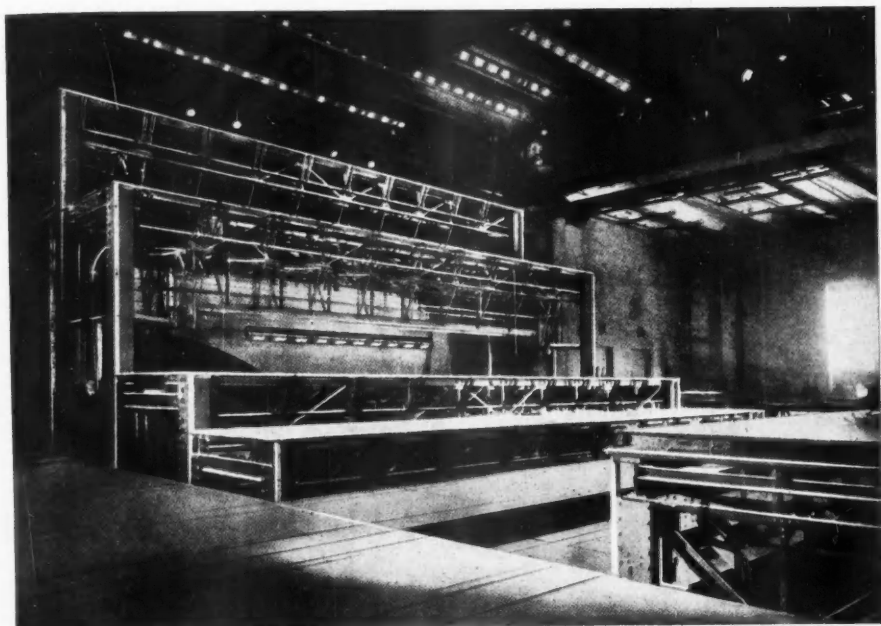
DRP 370,166, adopted in the Theatre Pigalle in Paris. And Kranich does not seem to believe in himself, since he gives in figure 145 a trap which he himself has constructed.

Interesting is his description of the treatment that has been given to the scene showing the Rhine-maidens in Wagner's "Rhinegold." In one of the most modern productions, that of Lubeck, 1926, the old swimming contraptions were abolished, and the actors clad in luminous paint moved upwards and downwards in a terraced stage. The whole stage was dark, the only light coming from spot-lights.

In the chapters on "Upper Machinery" the technical managers of small theatres will find many good hints. Almost up till 1900 air clouds were painted on screens and drop curtains. Changes were given by cloud rails or by colour changes in the lighting. Later on, the existing constructions for variable scenery was used for clouds as well. Clouds of gauze stitched on to rails were made to give the effect of passing-by. Then came the cyclorama. Kranich says that no cyclorama at present is practical, and proposes a cyclorama of aluminium. But the cyclorama in the theatre Pigalle seems to me to be ideally constructed. Kranich's cyclorama has, of course, its advantages, but also its disadvantages. The upper back-stage gets unnecessarily obstructed through the drawing up of the cyclorama. Besides, in a big stage with all sorts of representations, a blue linen cyclorama would also be needed as well as a crescent of black velvet.

His ideas about a variable proscenium are very sound. This has been carried out by Lizzmann in the National Theatre, Weimar, (page 198) and is combined with a trap-orchestra and a flight of steps. Thus the audience has been brought into contact with the actors, and the auditorium has become part of the stage. In the following pages Kranich deals with variable scenery and recent stage-systems. But here I must point out that the modern stage is out-growing the plastic scenery of the last twenty years. Scenery now tends to consist of coloured angular planes, plastic floor-elevations, and colour and light. Very interesting is plan 15 (page 240) where Kranich shows how painting was predominating in the baroque stage, how it yields to a more





DOUBLE RISING AND FALLING STAGE  
MECHANISM, BERLIN OPERA HOUSE.



ACT I, SCENE 2. "THE SEA COAST OF WALES," FROM J. E. FLECKER'S "DON JUAN," AS PRODUCED BY THE KING'S COLLEGE (LONDON) DRAMATIC SOCIETY.

## THE TECHNIQUE OF THEATRE CONSTRUCTION

solid technique in the illusory stage, and how lighting is more and more taking the place of scenery on the modern stage. But he has quite forgotten to treat of the art of making scenery by means of light and coloured shadows, a method that has been much practised in Dresden, and that might become customary on the whole European stage if the problem of a regulable and punctual light source could be solved.

The chapter on revolving stages is also interesting from the historical point of view, though revolving stages will probably die out in future, since the revolving "discs" have all their advantages and are more economical.

A really useful and technically perfect stage

is not hitherto to be found anywhere, says Kranich. I should like to mention just once again the Theatre Pigalle in Paris. And I hope the National Theatre in England, will soon come into being as *the* modern stage of Europe.

We must be thankful to Kranich for his instructive and meritorious work. He has with immense labour worked and produced a book that has been in demand for a great many years. The lesser faults will be eliminated in the next edition, and I hope that by then the second and concluding volume of the work will be ready. The book is fluently written, and avoids thereby the fault of most technical books, that of being boring. I would heartily recommend it to all who have anything to do with the theatre.

## NATIONAL THEATRE CRITICS

By Geoffrey Whitworth

IN the last number of "Drama" we promised some comment on the opinions of those of our correspondents who had not seen their way to endorse whole-heartedly the proposal to establish a National Theatre in London. Five or six replies were couched in an unconditional negative, and one can only surmise the reasons which inspired them. An extra farthing on the Rates—a decimal fraction on Income Tax—these are respectable objections to which most of us would subscribe. And indeed the feeling that at a time like this, we have no right to impose further burdens on the Exchequer (however diminutive) is one which may well give us pause. As a definitely propagandist organisation the Drama League's duty, however, is plainly to state the case for a National Theatre as forcibly as possible. We must be content to leave the financial decision to those whom it ultimately concerns, always with the proviso, that we believe a way might be found for the realisation of our hopes without further burdens being laid upon the tax—or rate-payer.

Probably the majority of the negative answers were due to a natural distrust of State aid for the theatre, as involving some form of academic control. Mr. H. M. Harwood expressed this point of view with

refreshing frankness when he wrote: "National Theatres, where they exist, have not, in my experience of the last thirty years, been responsible for any but the very smallest proportion of the really interesting dramatic productions. The country where the most famous of National Theatres exists has been, during this generation, probably the most backward in Europe; and is only now beginning to look up—and this owing entirely to the efforts of small outside managers."

The fallacy here lies surely in the implication that the existence or non-existence of a National Theatre has much, if anything, to do with the creative urge, the presence or absence of which marks the varying periods of dramatic activity and decline. These periods occur as part of a process the causes of which we cannot always fathom. But it is certain that they are not conditioned by anything so simple as the presence or absence of a National Theatre. I freely admit that a National Theatre cannot of itself create, or even inspire a dramatic revival. This, however, is a very different thing from asserting that a National Theatre acts in some mysterious manner as a dead weight from which it is well-nigh impossible for the dramatic impulse to free itself. To argue thus would lead us to infer that England

## NATIONAL THEATRE CRITICS

was the most flourishing theatre land in Europe—a claim which it would be hard to substantiate.

It may be true that one does not visit the average State or Municipal Theatre for examples of the most daring and experimental type of drama and stage craft—though in the sphere of stage-construction the endowed theatres of Germany have for a long while led the way. At the same time we should remember that experiment is not the primary purpose of a National Theatre. Its primary purpose is, or should be to spread a taste for good drama and to maintain a repertory of the masterpieces of dramatic art in a way which no other theatre can accomplish.

Mr. Ernest Newman would be prepared to erect a National Theatre so long as it is not financed by public money, and so long as it "pays for itself." Alas! The experience of those who have tried to do the thing on any scale worthy to be called "National" is all against Mr. Newman. Mr. Harwood realizes this, though I am sure he is still too optimistic—or else too modest—in his idea of the duties of a National Theatre—when he estimates that it could be run without any endowment if only the theatre could be "relieved from the fantastic taxation under which we at present labour." Strange that no Continental country finds it possible to run a National Theatre on such a basis! Strange that in *this* country no one found it possible in the piping days before the war!

We come back always and always to the need to define what the aims and what the practice of a National Theatre should be. Mr. Arnold Bennett cannot help us here, for at present his "attitude is non-committal." But there are some who are definitely in sympathy, yet who advise us "to begin in a small way." I am not sure that they do not want us to "end in a small way" too. They feel, perhaps, that the Big is somehow the enemy of the Small, and that a collective effort such as that inherent in the idea of a National Theatre may hamper the individual efforts from which the theatre as we know it has grown.

But how far, how very far, is all this from the simple truth! And in any case, in art there is no place for quantitative measurements, just as there can be no valid basis of rivalry between the collective effort and the individual.

There is room for both, and for each an abiding purpose.

As a friend reminds me, when Edward the Confessor was founding his Abbey at Westminster, the Parish Church near-by was also in process of re-building. The two churches grew side by side the one in the shadow of the other. "What wicked waste!" cried the passers-by. "St. Margaret is good enough for us. What do we want with St. Peter?" So they tried to work up jealousy among the saints, but the Confessor shut his ears to this babble, while in Paradise St. Margaret and St. Peter raised their hands in benediction. St. Margaret blessed St. Peter's Minster, and St. Peter blessed his sweet friend's Parish Church.

And this is a parable, as you may see to this day.

### PLAY CHOOSING.

We have received from Messrs. Robert Grant & Son, 126 Princes Street, Edinburgh, a tiny pamphlet on the above subject which may well prove useful to beginners in dramatic work on study. The author is Miss Jean Belfrage, and she gives some useful hints on the selection of plays with special emphasis on the needs of Scottish Societies. There are short lists of recommended plays, divided under the headings of "Scottish Plays—Comedy," "Scottish Plays—Drama," "Rural Plays," "One Act Plays" and "Costume Plays." The price of the pamphlet is 1s.

### THE NEW LIBRARY CATALOGUE

The publication of "The Players Library," the new Catalogue of the British Drama League Library, has been unavoidably postponed, but the printers assure us that it should be ready for issue by the end of this month. The reduced price of 4s. for members of the League (plus 4d. for postage) will still hold up till the date of publication. Thereafter the ordinary price of 5s. per copy must be paid alike by members of the League and the general public. A special cloth-bound edition will also be available, price 7s. 6d. This is being published on behalf of the League by Messrs. Victor Gollancz.

# NEWS FROM NORTH AND SOUTH

## THE SCOTTISH NATIONAL PLAYERS

The recent fiasco of "The Ancient Five" seems to have had a beneficial effect upon the reading committee of the Scottish National Theatre Society.

On November 12th they gave a bill of three one-act plays as under:—

"The Girl who did not want to go to Kuala Lumpur," by "Mary Henderson."

"Shall we join the Ladies," by J. M. Barrie.

"Pot Hooks," by Ian Cameron.

The first was an amusing comedieta in three scenes. A young woman on the verge of expatriation is rescued from her shady uncle and aunt by the machinations of her friends. The acting was excellent, particularly that of Mr. George Yuile in the character of a postman-cum-divinity-student who finally effected the rescue. Catherine Fletcher gave a crisp study of the typical Glasgow landlady. The piece had a deal of irresponsible fun about it that has been missing from the Players performances for too long.

Barrie's unfinished play was given a most satisfactory performance. Incidentally it seems to have puzzled the local press not a little. One critic stated that the murderer was cleverly unmasked. Another saw "Mr. Smith" as a self-revealed fratricide. But this is by the way. The play offers many obstacles to the producer which were successfully overcome. It was given in a simply effective set of black curtains, green carpet, and red chairs with a big red door at back centre. Mr. Moultrie Kelsall's Butler was so good as to 'steal' the play from Sam Smith, in spite of a very sound performance from Mr. Hal Stewart.

"Pot Hooks" was so bad that it is not worth the barest mention. Nevertheless we had two good plays well done, and their success warrants a production of "What Every Woman Knows" at the end of December. More attention was paid to decoration than has recently been apparent, with good results. The Studio Scene in the first piece had real atmosphere. Also there were several new names in the cast. Madeleine Christie and Iain Saddler ought to be very useful to the Players in future.

D.S.

## WEST HERTFORDSHIRE PLAYERS

The performance of "To have the Honour" by the West Hertfordshire Players at Rickmansworth in November was marked by two features: the excellence of most of the individual actors in their chief scenes and a certain ineffectiveness about the whole, which was due partly, apparently, to lack of rehearsal and partly to the more than leisurely pace at which the piece was taken. I did not take my watch in my hand and time Angela in the 2nd act when she fetched Imogen from the garden, but I am ready to believe that the actual time taken was just about what it would take in real life to cross a tennis lawn and go round by the asparagus beds to the lily pond, but this is several minutes too long from the point of view of members of the audience, who receive the impression that the garden is the size of Hyde Park, and are proportionately bored. With more attention paid to this and to the equally important question of sufficient rehearsal, the West Hertfordshire Players should give productions of outstanding merit.

## WATFORD SCHOOL OF MUSIC D.S.

The production by Miss Rose Lloyd-King of "Secrets" at St. John's Hall, Watford, in November was interesting not only in itself but as showing an extraordinary gain in technique since I last saw a performance by this Society. The first scene was the least good. The players here seemed to find the lack of scenery trying and the tendency was to recite the lines rather than to get thoroughly into the parts, but this fault was not noticeable in the rest of the play in which it may be said that almost every part was well cast and well played. With the exception of the log cabin scene—a most effective setting—curtains were used throughout instead of scenery, an arrangement very much to be commended to groups of amateurs who are handicapped by small stages and lack of funds.

## NEW EARSWICK

Miss Mary Pendered's play "The Quaker" has been recently produced by the New Earswick Dramatic Society, and repeated for three nights at Leicester. "He is brave who does not fear to be called a coward" is the message of the play. The test is not through war, but through the way in which the eighteenth century gentlemen re-act to the duel in which they find themselves engaged over the heroine of a lady. Would a Quaker fight if pushed beyond the limit? It is a striking problem, and was very ably interpreted by the New Earswick Company. Costumes and mountings were true to period, and Mrs. C. W. Sorensen is to be congratulated on her thorough understanding of the work of the producer.

## PLYMOUTH

Mrs. Arthur Pickan's Dramatic Society has been very active of late. Two Light comedies have been produced, "On Approval" and Aimee and Philip Stuart's "Her Shop." There have also been three shows combining Music and Fantasy, designed by Mrs. Pickan. Each has been played for a week, the Comedies at the Globe Theatre, and the Musical Fantasies at the Guildhall.

## THE OLD DRURY PLAYERS

John Masefield's "Melloney Holtspur" was produced by the Old Drury Players in the Little Theatre of the City Literary Institute on December 13th and 14th. To represent a baronial hall on a small stage might easily produce a ludicrous result, but Miss Charlotte Davies, in her production, succeeded in conveying a sense of space, and avoided a crowded effect. The play deals with the love affairs of two generations. The romance of Lonny Copshrews, a temperamental painter, with Melloney Holtspur ends in parting and bitterness, but the passing of two decades sees Melloney's nephew in love with Lenda Copshrews, the artist's daughter by his French wife. Here Melloney and Lonny appear as ghosts, the former attempting to thwart the romance. The conflict and subsequent reconciliation of the former lovers held the attention of the audience, and Masefield's creation of atmosphere was well maintained. The cast was a very even one, both the principles and the minor roles getting the most out of their parts.

RALPH BINFIELD.



## NEWS FROM NORTH AND SOUTH

### LONDON QUILL CLUB PLAYERS IN "KARMA"

A new play of serious emotional intent that will hold an audience for a couple of hours, and satisfy in its denouement, is not easy to find. When found the discovery can only be revealed by good casting and good acting. In their production of "Karma" at Blackfriars Theatre on December 16th and 17th the Quill Club Players successfully demonstrated that this new play of Eastern ideas by Almond Trevosso is a worth-while play, and the audiences acclaimed it a first-class entertainment.

With commendable stage economy the tense story, with well-timed comic relief, is enacted in one set throughout by six persons, and, a welcome feature of the play is that it provides two juvenile parts demanding the sort of hard work for which stage charm is not a substitute though a necessary adjunct. These parts were successfully taken at Blackfriars by Miss Irene Urquhart and Mr. Ernest Pye. The play was well put on, and the setting evinced good understanding of the author on the part of the producer, Mr. Alfred Moore.

A different one-act play preceded "Karma" at each performance. "Bill's Young Brother" by Arthur Du Soir proved stronger in characterization than in action; "A Penny for the Guy" by Margaret Macnamara, a short play well above the average in originality of conception and dramatic merit.

NOEL JAMES.

### KING'S COLLEGE, LONDON.

Fleckers' "Don Juan" is a difficult play to deal with on the stage, and the King's College Dramatic Society are to be congratulated on the very intelligent and spirited performance given in their Great Hall at the end of last term. Great pains had evidently been taken by all concerned in the production, but an equal cause of success was the courage and absence of self-consciousness with which the players went to work. There is much in this play which must prove disconcerting or even ridiculous were it treated with trepidation. But this was far from being the case, and the brave sincerity of the actors gave expression to the beauty and strangeness which makes this play of Fleckers, for all its wilfulness, perhaps the greatest poetic drama of the past decade. Don Juan himself was unequally played. But when the young actor was at his best he was very good.

### BATH

On the opening night of the Autumn Season there was the heaviest enrolment of new members for the Bath Playgoers since the inspection of the Society several years ago. For February the programme includes Two Play-readings: "The Apple Cart" and "The First Mrs. Fraser," on February 12th and 26th respectively. On March 12th Mr. N. Ker Lindsay will move for debate a resolution to the effect that "the tendencies of Modern Drama are subversive of Public Morality," to be opposed by Mr. J. L. Linsley-Thomas. The Society has also received many invitations to give readings before local organisations.

### FRIENDLY CENTURION'S D.S.

This Society is shaping towards great achievements. Its work is thorough and it is beginning to understand the subtler possibilities of good team-work. In "A Safety Match" by Ian Hay, played on November 7th at the Cripple-gate Theatre, the quality of the Company was put to a severe test, for two scenes depended on lighting, and there had been no lighting rehearsal; yet by alertness, mutual help and sincerity those scenes—a riot and a coal-mining accident—were well put across. Mr. H. Boisseau, the producer, is to be congratulated, especially on his flair for casting and on the discretion with which he keeps the performers in one harmonious key. The heaviest work fell to Mr. A. Brooksbank Pearcey, and he took it with apparent ease and more than a touch of distinction. Miss Elsie Oates, as Daphne Vereker, was at her best in the serious passages. The dispersing audience was justified in its general murmur, "One of the best shows the Centurions have given."

M.M.

### THE BIRMINGHAM MUNICIPAL PLAYERS

The Municipal Players, one of the most energetic of the many amateur dramatic societies in Birmingham, opened their present season on the 25th and 26th October with a production of W. B. Yeats' play "The Countess Cathleen."

Mr. Bladon Peake, the producer secured the correct atmosphere together with a very high standard of production, and with the exception of one or two of the smaller characters the whole caste acquitted themselves well.

As a "curtain-raiser" Shaw's "Dark Lady of the Sonnets" was produced in which Mr. T. C. Kemp as Shakespeare and Mr. Sidney Nash (Beefeater) did good work.

F.W.B.

### NEW PLAYS WANTED

The following Societies affiliated to the League are willing to consider MSS. of unproduced plays with a view to production.

THE SWINTON PLAYERS. Secretary, Mr. Laurie Rowlands, 46 Brookfield Avenue, Swinton, Rotherham. Percentage terms obligatory.

THE WOOLMAN PLAYERS (John Woolman Settlement, Students' Association.) Secretary, Miss E. Eunice Horner, 48 Arlington Street, Islington, N.1. This Society prefers plays with a comparatively small cast (say 6 to 9 characters) and no crowd scenes.

THE GUILD OF PLAYERS, DUMFRIES. Secretary, Mr. James S. Dunn, 10 Janefield Gardens, Maxwelltown.

SHEFFIELD DISTRICT Y.M.C.A., DRAMATIC SECTION. Secretary, Mr. A. Levy, Y.M.C.A., Fargate, Sheffield.

THE FOLK HOUSE PLAYERS, BRISTOL. Secretary, Mr. P. Goodway, 12 Gloucester Street, Clifton.

ements.  
erstand  
k. In  
members  
of the  
scene  
ighting  
ncerty,  
dent-  
ducer,  
casting  
perfor-  
ork full  
it with  
nction.  
at her  
dience  
of the  
I.M.

ergetic  
ngham  
26th  
play

ormed  
ard of  
e two  
quitted

dy of  
Kemp  
r) did

Y.B.

the  
c. of  
tion.  
launie  
nton,

ettle-  
ctary,  
treet,  
plays  
to 9

etary,  
den,

erok.  
gate,

etary,  
treet,